

Wednesday 14 October 2009

New species identified in South Coast rivers study

A new species of fly and a shrimp-like crustacean have been discovered on the South Coast following a detailed investigation of 31 major rivers across the region.

The two-year study, funded by South Coast NRM and undertaken by the Department of Water and UWA's Centre of Excellence in Natural Resource Management, involved undertaking an ecological 'snapshot' of South Coast rivers, including several which had never been sampled before.

The new species included a shrimp-like amphipod in the Family Paramelitidae and a caddisfly species in the Family Hydroptilidae, among others.

Other surprises included a build up of Mosquito fish and east coast yabbies in some rivers, which pose a threat to biodiversity.

Apart from identifying 'hotspots' for species richness and endemism, the study also noted the presence and relative abundance of invertebrates, fish and aquatic vegetation and algae, at each of the selected sites while also assessing foreshore condition and habitat type.

CENRM associate professor Dr Barbara Cook said the study was the first of its kind and revealed how unique our aquatic systems are on the South Coast compared to elsewhere in the state.

"Many of the rivers we had never sampled before and had no idea of the plants or animals there. As a result of the study, we've now come up with a ranking scheme according to the ecological value of our rivers which will indicate to our decision makers just which rivers are worth investing in," Dr Cook explained.

The rivers with the highest level of ecological value in the west of the region include the Shannon, Deep and Gardner Rivers, and the highest ranking rivers in the east of the region are the Bremer, Oldfield and Jerdacuttup Rivers.

The study identified two distinct aquatic bio-regions; with the eastern part of the South Coast region significantly more saline, slightly more alkaline, and containing higher levels of total nitrogen and different macro-invertebrate communities than those in the west. Rivers in the west of the region revealed more species diversity.

South Coast NRM chief executive Rob Edkins said the information provided a valuable benchmark for future conservation activities and reinforced the importance of initial research and ongoing funding into the protection of our South Coast river systems.

Mr Edkins said South Coast NRM invested over \$291,000 into the study.

“This is a great example of the type of work CENRM has been doing in the South Coast region. South Coast NRM is looking forward to using the findings to update the South Coast Regional Strategy for NRM.”

South Coast NRM will be hosting a presentation of the river report findings by Dr Barbara Cook on Tuesday 20 October as part of National Water Week.

Community members are welcome to attend this free presentation from 2pm to 3.30pm at the South Coast NRM boardroom at 39 Mercer Road, Albany. Afternoon tea will be provided.

Please RSVP for catering purposes to Jenelle Carter on (08) 9845 8521 or jenellec@southcoastnrm.com.au

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For a copy of the rivers report, visit www.livingrivers.southcoastwa.org.au

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The not-for-profit South Coast Natural Resource Management Inc. is the leading regional group for natural resource management on the South Coast of Western Australia. Funding is provided by the Australian Government and the Government of Western Australia.